



United States Air Force

ONLINE news

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Vol. 2, No. 9

The official USAF newspaper (<http://www.af.mil/newspaper>)

March 8, 2000

NEWSBYTES

F-22 wing: AF files notice

The Air Force published a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register March 3 to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement assessing the potential impacts of a proposal to beddown the initial F-22 operational wing. The first aircraft delivery is scheduled in 2004.

The proposal is to beddown 72 operational aircraft grouped into three squadrons. The Air Force will screen five alternative locations for the initial beddown, including Langley Air Force Base, Va.; Eglin AFB and Tyndall AFB, Fla.; Elmendorf AFB, Alaska; and Mountain Home AFB, Idaho.

Langley is the preferred alternative, but each alternative will be screened to determine if it warrants detailed analysis in this EIS. Each alternative that fits the criteria for the initial beddown, as well as the "no action" alternative will be analyzed. (Courtesy ACC News Service)

Reserve IDTs OK on mil-air

Reservists performing inactive duty for training tours outside the continental United States may now fly in space-required, priority 4 status on military aircraft.

A provision of the fiscal 2000 National Defense Authorization Act permits reservists to travel overseas for IDTs on Department of Defense aircraft. To get on board, reservists need a written authorization, other than an official travel order, which indicates the dates and locations of the IDT.

Reservists should check with their local traffic management office for further guidance on this policy. (Courtesy AFRC News Service)

Leap year rollover smooth

As anticipated, Air Force officials said there were no major problems or impact to the mission during the leap year rollover, Feb. 29.

Readiness concerns persist

■ Despite successes, AF faces challenges

By Senior Airman
A.J. Bosker
Headquarters United States Air Force

WASHINGTON — Despite the success of Operation Allied Force there are many challenges facing the Air Force that, unless addressed, will affect its ability to continue at its current operations tempo, said the Air Force chief of staff during an appearance before the Senate Armed Services Committee March 1.

Gen. Michael E. Ryan spoke to the committee about the need for increased funding to reverse the continuing decline in Air Force
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Photo by Kenn Mann

With Air Force people spread thin around the globe, Gen. Michael E. Ryan, Air Force chief of staff, continued to address readiness concerns last week during testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Focus on medical benefits

■ Senate hears TRICARE, medical readiness issues

By Staff Sgt. Cynthia Miller
Headquarters United States Air Force

WASHINGTON — Air Force leaders advocated equitable medical benefits and expanding TRICARE for active duty, family members and retirees during their appearance before the Senate Armed Services subcommittee on military personnel March 2.

Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Lester L. Lyles called for simplifying and expanding the TRICARE system and the removal of co-payments for active-duty family members enrolled in TRICARE Prime.

"In addition to making TRICARE more

user-friendly, we must expand it to include the families of 80,000 service members whom today are not covered by TRICARE Prime Remote," General Lyles said.

"While designed to discourage hospital visits, co-payments unfairly penalize those service members without access to military treatment facilities and have become a symbol of the inequities in the current TRICARE program," he said.

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations scores Air Force hospitals consistently higher than their civilian counterparts. But quality of care is not the issue — access and administration is, according to General Lyles.

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Letters to the editor

U.S. Air Force Online News publishes letters based on their appeal to an Air Force-wide audience each week. Send your letter to the U.S. Air Force Online News staff by completing the online form at <http://www.af.mil/newspaper/>

Due to the number of letters, not all letters can be published. Letters may be edited for grammar and length. Only letters accompanied by a valid name and email address will be considered.

Due to the length of the editorial, Letters to the Editor can only be found online this week.

Letters this week focus on **Reaction to no court martial for Maj. Sonnie Bates;**



comments about the need to change Space-A travel; and the proposed new Air Force logo. Read these letters and more online.

YOUR HEALTH

Is righteous indignation more important than good healthcare?

By retired Lt. Col. George Kelling
Wilford Hall
Public Affairs

LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE, Texas —

I think I'm one of the victims of broken promises. I entered the Army in 1958, and while I don't remember anyone specifically telling me that I would have free healthcare for life, I certainly went through my Army career with the understanding that military healthcare would be there for me until I curled up my toes and went to the big Reveille formation in the sky.

As we enter a new century, it is clear that things have changed and that we are going to have to participate in the cost of the healthcare we receive. In our indignation over the costs involved in TRICARE, we often forget what we get for our money. The free healthcare we expected was the very product which inspired "MASH," "No Time for Sergeants" and a host of other satires about the military life. Our focus was on care, of whatever quality, at no cost.

I am familiar with three sides of the TRICARE issue. I was an Army medic, am now a retired soldier, and currently work in the public affairs office of the Air Force's largest medical center. Perhaps because of this background, my pragmatism overrides my indignation, and I feel my family and I have all the healthcare in the world available, although at a slight cost.

I have seen the miracles that today's medicine produces. Many of today's routine healthcare measures, such as MRI, assisted reproduction and laser eye surgery were just dreams 35 years ago. I don't want free, 1958-era care. I want state-of-the-art care, and it is extremely expensive.

As an Air Force employee in public affairs, I have been charged with telling the story of military medicine and TRICARE. I hear complaints as well as praises,



and I have seen enough to depend on TRICARE and to want it to stay. Under the TRICARE system, my family has guaranteed, high-quality healthcare, either on base or downtown. There is a cost, but it is great value for the money.

Finally, as a pragmatic retiree and healthcare consumer, I put my family's health ahead of the righteous indignation I might feel over broken promises. In the days before TRICARE, getting healthcare was similar to a weekend in Vegas. If you hit the jackpot, you got the best care in the world on base for

nothing. On the other hand, if your luck ran out and care was not available, you were on your own, trying to find care downtown with little guidance and limited subsidy. As a TRICARE Prime enrollee, it is all there for me, although I have to pay something. Even if the care is not available on base, I have expert assistance in getting quality care downtown.

Do I enjoy paying \$460 per year for TRICARE Prime? Not at all. Does the system work perfectly? By no means. Is TRICARE as customer-friendly as it could be? It has a long way to go. In military treatment facilities, is the system hassle-free? I wish it were. I think the more important questions though are in the quality of what I get.

I would like nickel-a-gallon gasoline, eternal bliss and free healthcare. In the imperfect world I inhabit, I settle for going to the corner gas station, being reasonably happy and using TRICARE. It works, and it is a system my family and I have found we can count on. I hope TRICARE stays, although there is certainly room for improvement.



Operation Atlas Response AF increases support for Mozambique relief

WASHINGTON —

The Air Force is continuing its support of Operation Atlas Response, with three HH-60s on two C-5 Galaxy aircraft and three MH-53s on another four C-5 aircraft expected to arrive this week.

The Air Force is leading the joint task force operation as part of President Bill Clinton's offer of increased assistance to the African nations devastated by recent flooding.

The Air Force has several hundred people and aircraft in and en route to southern Africa, where they are establishing staging bases for a humanitarian airlift into the region. U.S. people will use a South African air base to receive humanitarian cargo and then shuttle the cargo to several sites in Mozambique, including Maputo and Beira.

Three C-130 Hercules aircraft, from the



Members of the 86th Contingency Response Group, Ramstein Air Base, Germany, and U.S. European Command's Special Operations Component board a C-5 Galaxy enroute to South Africa in support of flood relief efforts in Mozambique.

86th Airlift Wing's 37th Airlift Squadron, Ramstein Air Base, Germany, departed March 5. Seven C-130s from Ramstein, including two that left March 4 and two others that left March 3, are transporting more than 122 support people and 118,000 pounds of airdrop and tactical aircraft support equipment to Hoedspruit, South Africa. The HH-60s and MH-53s will operate out of Beira.

Additionally, a C-5 Galaxy from Air Mobility Command also left Ramstein March 5, carrying more than 65 service members and 63 tons of

support equipment from Ramstein's 86th Contingency Response Group and the Special Operations Component, U.S. European Command.

This article is available in its entirety online.

their local finance office.

Mr. Toye said GSA officials made it clear there "would be no more extensions." His guidance in the meantime to DOD finance officials is to implement the travel card program to the maximum extent possible. He said the extension does not mean Congress is rethinking the policy. It has just taken longer than expected for government agencies to work out the details.

Sijan award recipients

Recipients of the 1999 Lance P. Sijan U.S. Air Force Leadership Award were recognized in a ceremony March 6 by Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Michael E. Ryan.

The award recipients are: Col. Paul G. Shafer, commander, Joint Warfare Analysis Center, Dahlgren, Va., Capt. Mark T. Daley, 21st Special Operations Squadron, Royal Air Force, RAF Mildenhall, United Kingdom; Senior Master Sgt. Gordon H. Scott, 7th Special Operations Squadron, RAF Mildenhall, and Staff Sgt. Thomas B. Mazzone, 3rd Aerial Port Squadron, Pope Air Force Base, N.C.

The complete versions of the above articles are available online.

Readiness concerns persist

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readiness.

"With your support and with sustained funding our readiness decline can be turned around," General Ryan said. "But it hasn't happened yet."

"While the readiness trend has not been reversed, our airmen continue to perform their worldwide mission with great pride and professionalism," he said. "Our airmen put forth a tremendous effort in the air war over Serbia by opening 21 expeditionary bases and operating over 500 aircraft. During which, we continued to fly sustained combat operations in Iraq and support multiple humanitarian efforts."

But challenges remain for the Air Force. General Ryan said, "We are losing too many of our experienced people, both enlisted and officers. But I am hopeful that the increased pay and retirement benefits and the stability provided by our air expeditionary force schedule will help us retain more of these airmen we so value."

To help the Air Force achieve this goal, the general cited a need for increased health care funding.

"I remain concerned about the health care provided for our Air Force people and their families, both active duty and retired," he said. "They have earned and deserve our support to keep the health care promise."

With fewer people and the "progressively aging force of aircraft, our airmen are having to work harder to maintain readiness," he said. "We have addressed our most critical readiness requirements in the budget by funding the spare parts needed and by revitalizing our older, but still useful aircraft and equipment."

"However, this can only take us so far," he said. "We need to begin to replace systems that are approaching the end of their operational life such as the F-15C, with the much needed capability of the F-22. We also need to address the C-5 fleet, which is not in good shape and doesn't meet mission capability rates to support requirements for the two major regional conflicts context. We are working very hard and looking at meaningful ways to upgrade the fleet or in the long term replace it with C-17s."

This article is available in its entirety online.



Hearing focuses on TRICARE, medical

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"We must make TRICARE a user-friendly system by reducing the complex administrative procedures required to receive treatment," he said. "With nearly 40 percent of our deployable force deployed at any one time, the burden of confusing administrative procedures often rests on family members."

To address the inequities of the current TRICARE system, the Defense Medical Oversight Committee recently reviewed the new TRICARE 3.0 Managed Care Support Contract, and concluded it is an improvement from previous contracts and reflects lessons learned.

"We're confident that TRICARE 3.0 will better serve beneficiaries by encouraging closer coordination between contractors and military treatment facilities," General Lyles said.

TRICARE Senior Prime addresses the medical benefits of over-65 retirees and their families and provides for access to the National Mail Order Pharmacy.

"We are trying very hard to fulfill the promise made to our older retirees that they would have health care for life," said Lt. Gen. (Dr.) Paul K. Carlton Jr., Air Force surgeon general, who also appeared before the subcommittee. "I am happy to say that our participation in the TRICARE Senior Prime demonstrations have been well received, and enrollees have better prescription coverage than ever before."

In his opening remarks, committee chairman, Sen. Tim Hutchinson (R-Ark.), introduced "The Military Health Care Improvement Act of 2000" (S.2087), a proposal which addresses active-duty service member issues with the TRICARE program and takes the first step toward meeting the commitment to the Medicare-eligible military retiree population.

This article is available in its entirety online.

First privatized housing opens

By Staff Sgt.
Cynthia Miller
Headquarters
United States
Air Force

WASHINGTON

— Addressing quality of life concerns of many military families, the Air Force officially opened its first 92 privatized housing units at Lackland Air Force

Base in January, and is on track to complete an additional 328 units by February 2001.

The Lackland project is one of 34 housing privatization projects on 31 installations, and is the Air Force's response to the secretary of defense's tasking to the services to "revitalize, divest through privatization, or demolish inadequate housing by fiscal 2010."

Each revitalization project is outlined for the Air Force for either Military Construction Program or privatization execution in the Family Housing Master Plan. "This is our guide to the future," said Binks Franklin,



The Air Force opened its first privatized housing units at Lackland Air Force Base in January.

chief of facility privatization at the air staff.

Through the leasing and development of land on base, the Lackland project effectively moves the construction, revitalization and operations and maintenance costs of running family housing into the hands of a

private contractor.

Tenants of the new units are charged rent based on their pay grade and supplemented by Basic Allowance for Housing.

"Service members moving into the units will receive BAH to cover rental [and utility] expenses," Mr. Franklin said. "It is designed so the goal is no out-of-pocket expenses. We've allowed for 110 percent of reasonable utility costs to cover the utilities and the BAH balance will go toward paying rent."

This article is available in its entirety online.

DOD slashes base sales price

By Linda D. Kozaryn
American Forces Press Service

SAN ANTONIO (AFP) — Defense Secretary William S. Cohen received a standing ovation March 2 for giving Texans a \$102.8 million break on the bill for Kelly Air Force Base.

Secretary Cohen announced the price for the Air Force base dropped from \$108 million to \$5.2 million at a luncheon attended by 250 local officials and members of the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce.

Formerly, by law, local communities had to buy federal property when a military base closed. A provision of the Fiscal 2000 Defense

Authorization Act now allows the department to convey surplus property at no cost if it is used to generate jobs. This applies to property paid for by tax dollars. The community must still purchase properties paid for by user fees, such as NCO and officer clubs, bowling alleys and golf courses. In this case, the cost for such property at Kelly totals \$5.2 million.

DOD has also approved no-cost economic development conveyances at Naval Air Station Memphis, Tenn.; March AFB, Calif.; and the Naval Air Warfare Center, Indianapolis.

This article is available in its entirety online.



U.S. Air Force ONLINE news

U.S. Air Force ONLINE news is produced each Wednesday by the Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs and is available via Air Force Link (<http://www.af.mil/newspaper>). This funded U.S. Air Force newspaper is an authorized publication for Air Force members and their families. Content is endorsed by the Department of the Air Force, but is not necessarily the views of or endorsed by the U.S. Government or Department of Defense. Editorial offices: SAF/PAI, 901 N. Stuart Suite 605, Arlington VA 22203. Telephone (703) 696-7832, Fax (703) 696-9162. Please post on unit bulletin boards and pass this copy on to others who need current Air Force news and information. Reproduce as needed.

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